



The Team on a hike!



The Team and Connexion Staff!



The 2023 Connexion Retreat

## Dear Friends and Family,

It has been about a month since I arrived home from Germany, and I've been enjoying some much-needed rest (amidst the boiling Arizona heat!). I'm so incredibly thankful that I made the decision to go on this mission trip to Germany. I've journaled about my experiences since arriving home and wanted to share some of the amazing ways God was present with us.

### Our Day-to-Day in Bonn

Mia, Nick, Winfield, and I served with a Christian college ministry called Connexion that helps students at the University of Bonn learn about Jesus and grow their faith in Him. The first week there were numerous events planned designed to meet new students and welcome them to the group. The theming was the "Week of Welcome," and it was actually welcoming us as visitors from America, to create interest. During the first three days, we handed out 1500 flyers for our events!

Over the weeks that followed, we were very intentional in meeting new students, especially others seeking to know more about Jesus. We conducted numerous surveys to gauge people's religious background and current interest in religion with the hope of sparking spiritual discussion and opportunities to share the Gospel. Students were actually quite open to surveys and the long conversations that followed! We invited those we met to join us in a variety of activities: a hike, a frisbee tournament, Small Group Bible Studies, and casual meals to name a few. Awet, Lian, and Ernest were just a few of the guys I had the privilege to meet and spend time with.

The second week was unique in that students had a week off of class. This allowed us to do more elaborate fun events with the students still in-town. The main event was a trip to Cologne, filled with sightseeing, some great coffee and tea, and extended time getting to know many of the people we had just met, both new and consistent members of Connexion.

That weekend we went on a retreat with the three Connexion groups in Europe – Amsterdam, Bonn (us), and Braunschweig. It was a wonderful time of learning, building community, and fun shared experiences! One retreat highlight was a workshop called "Limited Edition," focused on accepting our limitations in order to reduce stress and focus in on living like Christ. Another was hiking around an old quarry with just my new friends Anurag, Tom, and Jacky!

Going into weeks three and four, we began to settle into a regular schedule. We started our days by spending time with God, both in prayer and reading the Bible. From there, we'd head to campus and prayer-walk as a group, conduct surveys, and follow through with any other commitments we had scheduled, before rounding out our evenings in Small Groups. And while our last two weeks were difficult—Winfield fell sick for a few days and Nick's knee injury limited his mobility—getting to celebrate my birthday with some new Connexion friends and prayer hiking with some of the Connexion guys were two highlights!

And just like that, our four weeks were over! With our goodbyes we left many little cards and gifts from America, which was a really nice way to leave relationships on a high note. It was a good sign, that we were successful in our efforts, by the amount of people we were going to—and do—miss.

### Ways God Moved

Now obviously, God was present during the *whole* trip. But to highlight a few ways I felt God present, I wanted to share a few struggles we had, and how God helped us through them!

Early in the trip, we struggled in feeling like we were not doing enough. The pace of life in Germany was quite different from that of America—let alone Los Angeles—and things were a bit slower paced overall. Something we'd learn is that this was a common concern among teams coming from America, and we didn't need to fill every moment. But initially, it was difficult fearing that we'd waste the trip and regret that we didn't do more.

Another more personal struggle was a misalignment between my heart and my spirit. I obviously wanted to be there, but I struggled with not wanting to do specific activities. This made it difficult, because when it comes to sharing my faith in Jesus, I want it to be genuine. While I initially tried to wrestle this through on my own, it was prayer and the help of my team that God used to shift things in my heart. And even now, while not perfect at it, I continue to pray for an earnest desire to love like Christ and share the Gospel as I seek to follow Jesus!

The amazing thing is that as challenges arose and we lifted these concerns up to God in prayer, they faded. Although sickness and injury really tested some members of our team, we all saw God work in incredible ways throughout our time there. He orchestrated connections we could not have planned. He challenged us to step out of our comfort zones, serve others, and love others as He loves. And He reminded us that our focus was to be on His heart and mission.

Germany was far more of a refining process than I imagined, thinking I had to be fully prepared. But that's the message of Jesus. In accepting His sacrifice, I am perfected before the Father, even in my imperfections. And my imperfections, something I've grown thankful for, become a way to ensure I'm constantly relying on my Lord Jesus.

Thank you for supporting me on this journey!

*Josiah Herfurth*



Tea with Anja

The Cologne Cathedral

Discipleship Group Prayer Hiking